‘Post-Conflict Curating’: the Arts and Politics of Belfast’s Peace Walls

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Introduction

Walking in Belfast can be a powerful visual experience of the city’s past and future alike. Particularly tourists are fascinated by the possibility of ‘reading the city’ through mural paintings, and they will take photographs next to the wall that used to divide Belfast, or next to images of the former armed paramilitaries. In contrast, the city’s residents seem to barely notice the depictions of the conflict any more. Yet there is a complex curatorial process behind any single wall, mural, and depiction - a process that is not only illustrative of ongoing conflict lines in society, but also of the curatorial authorities and power games behind the scenes.

Drawing on and contributing to the bodies of literature from both the discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies and Museum Studies, we will argue in this article that curatorial processes can be seen as part and parcel of processes of peace formation. They can legitimise processes of reconciliation through their representation in the public sphere as much as they can undermine such efforts through counter-images and visual challenges of a dominant peace narrative. In this light, the article will investigate the memoryscape of Belfast’s post-conflict landscape in the light of what we call “post-conflict curating” to cast light on the ethical and practical decisions that curators have to make in post-conflict contexts. To do so, it will zoom in on three Loyalist murals to cast light on the contested processes of curation and analyse those in the light of their role in the Northern Irish peace process.

The three murals that we discuss in depth in this paper have been selected for their use of materials and techniques which differ from those typically associated with the Northern Irish mural tradition. While these are not the only such murals we have identified, they are significant for their proximity to each other at their site of exhibition. We propose that these examples represent a significant shift not only in the production of murals, but their exhibition, interpretation and reception, too. Perhaps significantly, we have only been able to identify Loyalist examples of this shift so far.

Methodologically, we focus on uncovering the identity-narratives expressed through the murals by, first, visually analysing the image, text, and compositional elements of the murals, before moving on to critically examine the curatorial practices by which the murals are exhibited and interpreted at their Belfast site. Our emphasis on the word-image content of the mural, the discursive practices surrounding their distribution and reception, and our ultimate concern with the effect of these on social relations, is methodologically aligned with critical discourse analysis, particularly that of Fairclough (1992, 103). Our primary evidence base includes our own direct observations of the murals in situ,[1] and our photographic records made in the field.

Post-Conflict Curating: the City as Museum

The shift of critical focus from museums as relatively contained spaces towards the representation of culture and history in public spaces raises a specific set of not only logistical, but also ethical questions. To a certain extent, many cities, and very often post-conflict cities, have become open air museums (cf. Kappler 2017, 136) or even a "gallery space" (Bell 2009). Indeed, Williams (2007, 182) has argued that the opportunity to consider conflict at the site and on the scale in which it was experienced in the city offers a more powerful commemorative experience than the traditional museum. If we take this for granted, then the curatorial choices in a city are of key importance to the ways in which both inhabitants and visitors relate to the outdoor museum space.

In the expanded context of the city-as-museum, independent artists or residential communities may act as 'curators', as much as museum professionals, elite arts entrepreneurs, or a state bodies, though the form and the scope of curatorship may differ dramatically according to the intentions and resources in each case. Arguably, to avoid using the term 'curator' in the former contexts risks culturally subordinating the legitimate curatorial activities which are clearly in evidence at the 'community' level in post-conflict cities like Belfast, which in turn severely limits curatorial discourse and practice. Indeed, a broad use of the term curator is particularly appropriate in Belfast, which we argue has

[1] On the methodology of walking as a form of urban participant observation, see Mitchell and Kelly (2011).

become like an open-air museum not only in terms of its 'dark' appeal to the tourist-visitor, but also the extent to which its urban spaces are utilised in the exhibition and performance of ethnonational identity narratives. This is particularly important in a context in which most of the inhabitants of the city can relate to the segregation, suffering and contestations that are being curated publicly. In that vein, whilst curatorship in cityscapes may diverge from our ideas of a traditional curator who operates in museums, there are still important processes of selection and exhibition of public art and history at play. The concerted efforts of community activists, street artists, city authorities and other memory entrepreneurs result in a landscape of curatorships that is reflective of its underlying power relations. Decisions about which artwork makes it into the public sphere, where it is placed (Senie 2003, 186-7), how accessible it is, and about its embeddedness in the wider cityscape are all of crucial importance when it comes to dealing with the past publicly. The expanded curatorial context of the city-as-museum brings with it expanded ideas of the curator and of ethical curatorial practice. So while curators in an urban context may be seen to exercise what Harvey has called a fundamental, human, 'right to the city' (2008: 23), in the post-conflict city this right brings with it "responsibilities to stories of suffering" (Lehrer and Milton, 2011: 4). In that sense, we can argue that the curator is a powerful actor in terms of curating the difficulties of the past in relation to the cityscape, and also in relation to the ways in which communities who live in the space relive the traumas of the past on an everyday level. It is to the complex process of remembrance that our discussion will now turn.

Belfast's 'Troubled' Urban Landscape

The city of Belfast has gone through various changes in its identity, and the dividing lines throughout history are clearly noticeable in its urban landscape. It has visibly moved from its identity as a colonial city to an immigrant-industrial city, and eventually to an ethnonational city (Boal 2002, 690). This is coupled with a particularly high visibility of the violence that occurred in the second half of the 20th century. Not only the two 'hotspots', the Falls and Shankill Road, but also wider residential areas in East and West Belfast, are full of markers of the "Troubles", the period between the late 1960s and the late 1990s during the course of which violence was at its very peak and casualties amounted to over 3,000. This includes mail boxes painted in the national colours of each side, painted pavements, Irish and British flags, memorials and cemeteries, as well as the famous "murals". The tensions between the

"Loyalists", the militant unionists favouring continued rule from Great Britain, and the "Republicans", the militant nationalists supporting a reunion with the Republic of Ireland, have both developed strategies to mark their territories as well as political affiliations.

In that sense, Shirlow (2006) labels Belfast a "post-conflict city", with the urban landscape still shaped by traces of violence and segregation. The presence of the so-called "peace walls" is illustrative of this - the first one constructed in 1969, they tend to present themselves in the form of different layers of solid wall added above one another between particularly contested interfaces and are often covered with barbed wire (fig. 1). The walls tend to act as the backdrop for a plethora of painted murals, many of which convey imagery of violence. The walls can, in that vein, be considered symptoms of the ways in which Belfast's post-conflict phase has been managed through an approach of buying into the belief that "good fences make good neighbours" (Nagle 2009, 327). Cunningham and Gregory (2014) suggest that the peace walls can be considered "liminal spaces as performative zones" (p.65), relating to the important symbolic functions that the walls fulfil in the city as well as the reminder they send to citizens about the violence that has tended to take place in these areas. At the same time, given that residential areas can be found right next to the walls, those places of past violence are also places in which everyday lives take place (McDowell and Switzer 2011, 82). Public space is thus clearly integrated into people's daily routines, and the legacies of the conflict impact upon people's (im)mobility.

The state has been ambivalent in its attempts to manage space in order to reduce segregation (Nagle 2009, 331). Instead, pursuing multiple spatial strategies to address urban segregation and polarisation, such as "single-identity initiatives" or approaches to commercial regeneration (Nagle 2009, 332 ff.) in order to satisfy and consolidate the two communities, but has long shied away from promoting cross-cutting initiatives that go beyond the binary representation of community identities. The latter continue to be shaped by the presence of flags, marches and parades, all of which demonstrate the connection between territorial ownership and political / ethnonational affiliation. The territoriality of the conflict therefore has to be seen in connection with the ways in which political space is organised and practiced in the city (Shirlow 2006, 103). Indeed, there are persisting "cognitive maps of the conflict that resist efforts at redrawing" (Switzer and McDowell 2009, 338) and that engrain the notion of "post-conflict" heavily onto Belfast's identity map. Reid (2005) reminds us that this spatial structuring can be considered a socially performed phenomenon – a process that at

times resists the government-driven ambitions of rebranding the urban landscape (Neill 2006).

On the one hand, such a political landscape raises questions around the ways in which "difficult heritage" and "places of pain" can be dealt with in a post-conflict environment (cf. McDowell 2009, 225), given that many spatial markers bear traumatic memories of the violence of the past. The commemoration of past violence thus continues to remain segregated (McDowell and Switzer 2011, 82). On the other hand, there is a tendency to reflect on the ways in which this difficult heritage can benefit the city as well. Wiedenhoft Murphy (2010), for instance, comments on the ways in which West Belfast has discovered the economic and social potential of dark tourism. Indeed, tourists come to the city to visit the famous murals or even take walking tours through the former hotspots of violence.

In that sense, it seems as if Belfast's urban landscape is dominated by segregation and the reinforcement thereof, either through continuing restrictions of movement and the performance of segregation through parades and spatial markers, or alternatively for the staging of conflict as a tourist attraction (cf. Björkdahl and Kappler 2017, 99). This, however, does not mean that the urban landscape has come to a standstill. Much in contrast, Belfast's memoryscape is constantly changing, not least through the presence of cosmopolitan movements that challenge spaces of division (Nagle 2009). There are more efforts in terms of de-segregating the city through the creation of shared spaces and a thus-linked notion of "normalization" (Switzer and McDowell 2009, 338; 341), which, however, struggle to find resonance beyond the immediate localised space from which the initiatives emerge.

Belfast is therefore torn between its troubling past and an ambitious future that foresees a city free from sectarian violence and shared narratives of the past. We will therefore now discuss, in more detail, the curatorship of Belfast's peace-wall murals to investigate the challenges that curating a violent past brings with it and the ways in which the murals themselves reflect those.

Curating Belfast's Peace Walls

The political, social and economic issues of the post-conflict city find their cultural parallels in the curation of Belfast's peace-wall murals. Loyalist mural painting began in the early 20th century and "has its roots in the representations of working-class identities at a time when the city was a shipyard of global importance" (Murray 2016, 45). Republican murals emerged much later during the hunger strikes of the 1980s. During the Troubles, especially in the "hotspot" of the Shankill area, the murals reflected the respective paramilitary group in control and can thus be read as a visualisation of the power relations within each community (cf. Murray 2016, 60). Now they convey the complex and sometimes contradictory efforts of communities attempting to negotiate issues of identity, social justice and commemoration by non-violent means. State interventions in this process have now been well documented, varying from Belfast City Council's initiative of painting out the most offensive murals (Kelly 2008, 17), to the Art Council Northern Ireland's efforts to "replace divisive imagery with more positive concepts" (Wallace 2016, 6). Critics have argued that such interventions equate to a top-down sanitisation of the murals which fails to connect to the everyday grievances of the communities in which they are situated (cf. Murray 2016, 46; Rolston 2010, 286). This reflects the dilemma for publicly-funded curators aiming to strike a balance between the troubled past and a possible shared future.

We now turn our attention to recent developments in the curatorship of Loyalist murals of the peace walls that divide the Loyalist Shankill Road and the Republican Falls Road. As two of the main arterial routes to Belfast city centre, these roads run broadly parallel to each other, but are connected by several smaller streets, including Northumberland Street which is our site of interest. As one of the main streets linking the Republican and Loyalist areas, mural activity along Northumberland Street has traditionally functioned to visually reinforce the parameters of the two divided communities. One such example is the "Welcome to the Shankill Road" mural (fig. 2), with its easily-identifiable symbols of Loyalism such as the Red Hand of Ulster and the Orange Order, which until recently marked the halfway point between the Loyalist and Republican areas. We are interested in the murals that have started to *replace* this example and others at this site. Significantly, the murals of Northumberland Street are not a main feature of the walking tours offered by organisations like Belfast Political Tour, which tend to focus on the murals on the Falls and Shankhill roads, suggesting that the murals exhibited at this location continue to communicate directly with local residents, rather than tourists.

The Patterson Mural

The first example is the memorial to British army Lt. Col. John Henry Patterson (fig. 3), created at the junction of Northumberland Street and Beverley Street in May 2015. This mural was commissioned in by West Belfast Athletic and Cultural Association, an organisation which co-ordinates sporting and cultural events in the Shankill community. The mural was digitally-designed and printed on laminated hoarding panels fixed securely to the wall - a departure from the local tradition of painting directly onto the wall surface. From left to right, the mural includes a large photo of Patterson against a Union Jack background, with a brief text on Patterson's early life. This leads into a larger central section, dominated by text detailing Patterson's military career, including his command of the original UVF in 1913, and his leadership of The Jewish Legion in WWI. The mural concludes with an almost life-sized photo of a contemporary Israeli soldier saluting against a flag of Israel background. Across the top of the mural a quote reading "The Future is yours, if you have the will, if you have the faith" is written in larger text in both English and Hebrew. The text-heavy central portion of the mural and the smaller images which punctuate it, such as historical photographs of the Jewish Legion, require the viewer to come into close proximity to the mural to take in all of the detail. This is another departure from the local mural tradition, which has focussed on large-scale imagery and brief phrases of text that can be read quickly and easily at a distance of some meters away. Arguably, this development indicates changes in the function of the murals at this site, with the large-scale imagery and text that once signposted the parameters of the Loyalist area, now being accompanied by much more detailed historical accounts of past conflict facilitating a more contemplative commemorative experience.

The Band of Brothers Mural

The second example is the "Band of Brothers" mural (fig. 4), created in September 2015, directly to the left of the Patterson mural, on Beverley Street. The site was selected and the mural commissioned by the Lower Shankill Community Association, using Northern Ireland Housing Executive funds. The mural commemorates the contribution of the Polish airmen to the Battle of Britain (a decisive WWII air battle between the British RAF and German Luftwaffe which took place in the airspace above the south-east of England in 1940). It was the first in a series of three Belfast murals, funded by the Housing Executive, with the aim of

improving relations between Polish immigrant communities and more established local communities, following a spate of hate-crimes against Polish people in Belfast (Anon 2015). The mural was created by Ross Wilson, an art-school educated practitioner with a reputation for producing commemorative public art work throughout Northern Ireland, including the re-imaging of several murals in Loyalist areas (Young 2015). Like the Patterson mural, it was digitally-designed and printed on laminated hoarding fixed to the wall. The composition focuses on a central group of figures, the 303 Polish RAF Squadron, standing in front of Hurricane fighter plane. This large photograph is flanked on each side by a column of smaller photographic images of the Polish airmen. Further visual features include the RAF and 303 Squadron emblems; portrait photos of WWII RAF Air Chief Marshall Sir Hugh Dowding, WWII British Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief Winston Churchill, and Polish RAF Sgt. Josef Frantisek. Further illustrations of WWII RAF fighter planes, are set against a background which merges the 303 Squadron's signature red-and-white plane markings with the Union Jack. Like the Patterson mural, 'Band of Brothers' includes significant passages of text providing a historical explanation of the formation of the 303 Squadron and its contribution to the Battle, while a footnote informs the viewer that the photographic images in the mural are from the Imperial War Museum's collection. This direct use of photographic imagery, also found in the Patterson mural, is another recent development in Northern Irish murals, which have traditionally featured hand-painted imagery of the artist's own design.

The Kitchener Mural

The third and final example was created in May 2017, to the right of the Patterson memorial on Northumberland Street, replacing the "Welcome to the Shankill" mural mentioned earlier in this paper. This Kitchener mural (fig. 5) was commissioned by the Shankill Action for Community Transformation (ACT), a programme which aims to reintegrate former Loyalist paramilitary prisoners into society. The Shankhill ACT also hosts a museum documenting the history of the state of Northen Ireland, accessible by appointment only, at the organisation's headquarters on Northumberland Street, demonstrating the its perceived role as a community heritage organisation. The mural was designed by members of the local Loyalist community and local Muslim community that took part in a "shared identity" workshop, organised by ACT to promote good relations between these groups (Impongo 2017). Like the "Band of Brothers" example, the Kitchener mural was funded by the NI Housing Executive. Again, this mural has been digitally designed and printed on laminate hoarding. The composition is

dominated by a large central image of British War Minister Lord Kitchener appropriated from a well-known WWI British military recruitment poster. Kitchener is set against a Union Jack backdrop and underlined by the question "Are you one of Kitchener's Own?" in large text beneath. Above the mural's dedication "to all foreign nationals across the empire who … fought side-by-side with their British counterparts … during the First World War" is printed in smaller text. To the right of the Kitchener image, soldiers and pilots from the West Indies, India and Nepal are represented through historical photographs. While on the left, soldiers and military nurse from Canada are represented in the same way. Like the previous examples, the Kitchener mural also contains passages of text detailing the contribution of these countries to WWII, as well as a dedication to those who lost their lives in the war which is printed on the left in English, and on the right in French. Along with the use of Hebrew in the Patterson mural, this use of a language other than English in a Loyalist mural marks another interesting feature of these examples.

Re-Curating the Troubles?

Having established how these murals have been commissioned, produced and presented to the public, we will now consider what kind of identity-narratives are expressed through these examples. While the emphasis here has been on developments in the design and format of these murals, that is not to suggest that these new practices are somehow less "authentic" than the more established wall paintings that they are replacing. Indeed, we propose that the persistence of the mural tradition, in this adapted form, is evidence of the continued importance of the practice of visual commemoration to Loyalist community identity. However, the changes in the design and format of the murals may indicate that the past is being remembered in different ways post-conflict.

The overriding theme of military cooperation between Britain and other nation states runs through all three murals, with the Patterson and Kitchener examples commemorating the Jewish and Commonwealth soldiers and nurses of WWI, and the Band of Brothers example commemorating the Polish pilots of WWII. The potential for these murals to promote trust and tolerance amongst culturally-different people in Belfast was recognised by Housing Executive representative Jennifer Hawthorn who, at the unveiling of the "Band of Brothers" mural, expressed her hope that the mural would become a focal point for international tourists to the area (Impongo2 2015). While the overtly anti-racist ethos of the three mural examples

seems like a positive step towards peace in Belfast, the Loyalist solidarity with Polish, Jewish and Commonwealth people is expressed through a process of "othering" (Said 1978, 3), that is, the sense of shared identity that is forged through collaboration against the common enemy. For example, the hero of the Band of Brothers mural, who by inclusion of his individual portrait photo in the mural is elevated to the status of the British Air Chief Marshall and Commander-in Chief, is the Polish pilot who shot down the most German airmen. Furthermore, the very position assumed by the Lower Shankill Community Association in extending a welcome to Polish immigrants, serves both to naturalise and nationalise the Loyalist community's presence in the city. At the same time, it can be suggested that the visual support of Israel, in the Patterson example, implicitly expresses a political position that is opposed to the Republican solidarity with Palestine, as represented by Republic murals on the nearby Falls Road, which evoke support not only of the Palestinians cause, but also the Basque or other socialist struggles - such as South Africa - more generally (cf. Rolston 2009). Solidarities on the Loyalist side tend to lie more with state actors (in this case, Israel) and the associated self-perception as victims of terrorism (Rolston 2009, 466). This demonstrates how the process of memorialisation transcends national and regional boundaries and becomes transnational (cf. Sierp & Wüstenberg 2015; Sundholm 2011). At the same time, the mural representation is not just directed at the outside visitor, but just as much an acknowledgement of the community's suffering over decades (Rolston 2010, 294).

The cultural conflation of the Loyalist murals with the British state has been identified by Rolston who argues that "the portrayal of poppies and soldiers with bowed heads and downturned rifles would not be out of place on an official cenotaph" (2010, 301). We go further to argue that the violent "othering" identity narrative of the Loyalist murals discussed here is legitimized not only through the symbolism of the murals, but also through the curatorial practices by which they are presented to the public. The curatorship of all three examples can be seen to emulate the "Authorised Heritage Discourse", that is, the official heritage practices of the nation state, which serve to promote the experience and values of elite social classes, while alienating others (Smith 2006, 30). Authorised heritage discourse legitimises the dominant national-identity narrative by controlling the use of heritage. It focusses on the construction of heritage as a passive experience, something which the public are led to, instructed about, but not invited to engage with actively (Smith 2006, 31). We argue that this type of passive experience is created by our three mural examples, firstly,

through the use of digital design and laminate hoarding as the medium of the murals and, secondly, through their arrangement on the street. The waterproof, anti-graffiti properties of the hoarding, more typically used by property developers to visualise and secure construction sites through the graphic barrier that it creates, may serve a practical function in making these murals more durable than the traditional wall painting. However, in their design, these murals and their use of historical photography combined with text have much in common with the type of exhibition panel used by national museums. These parallels indicate how the viewer is expected to respond to the design. For example, at the Patterson mural, the viewer must approach the mural at close proximity in order to read its small-scale text and photographic image. The chronological narrative requires the viewer to approach the mural from the left and walk along the street beside it to the concluding panel on the right. A kind of embodied passivity is encouraged here in that the viewer is led by the narrative, rather than vice versa. In a similar way, the location of the three thematically-related murals in such close proximity to each other can be seen to emulate the enfilade gallery arrangement of a museum exhibition. This is particularly the case if the murals are approached from the Shankill side of Northumberland street, where the order in which they are encountered forms a chronological narrative, with the two WWI murals followed by WWII. Again, the requirement that these murals need to be viewed up close, rather than all at once from a distance, assumes the passive viewer will follow the prescribed path through urban space.

By appropriating the curatorial practices of the authorised heritage discourse, these murals can be seen to conflate the Loyalist-identity narrative with the dominant national-identity narrative. This particular identity-narrative encompasses many sub-national identities (i.e. British residents of Polish, Caribbean and Asian descent, and of Jewish faith) as comrades united against a common enemy. Conspicuous by their absence in this narrative, however, are the Irish nationalist contributions to WWI and WWII. The exclusion of the largely nationalist 10th and 16th Irish Division from the Kitchener mural is a particularly pointed omission from a narrative which aims to recognise the contribution of Britain's colonies to WWI. Indeed, it could be argued that local Republicans are the contemporary "other", against which friendly relations between Loyalist and Polish/Jewish/Commonwealth communities are defined. Some evidence that Irish Republicans are being "othered" by the seemingly well-meaning narratives of these recent murals can be found in the response of the West Belfast Cultural Association and the Police Service of Northern Ireland to an act of vandalism against the Patterson mural. In June 2016 a fire was lit at the base of the mural, burning away some of

the surface design. Rather than treating this as simple case of vandalism, or sectarianism, or the voice of political opposition (cf. Jarman 1998), the police treated this incident as an anti-Semitic hate crime. Shortly afterwards, the West Belfast Cultural Association erected a printed sign above the mural (fig. 6) asking "Where is the Equality?? This historically significant artwork was attacked and defaced by Irish Republican racists! Where is the Reconciliation??". While the case may be that the mural was damaged by Republicans, it is testament to the naturalisation of the Loyalist identity-narrative expressed through these murals that the curators of the Loyalist murals are now able to recast Republicans, not just as the enemy of Loyalism, but also as the criminal enemy of multicultural Britain and its international allies.

Conclusion

At this point, it is important to reinforce our intention to analyse just three mural examples at a very specific site in Belfast. The developments we have identified in the production and presentation of these murals are by no means representative of murals in Belfast, nor in Northern Ireland more widely. Similarly, the identity-narratives that we argue are expressed through these murals, and the curatorial practices which we propose serve to legitimise them, are not necessarily representative of Loyalist murals as a wider practice. It has not been our intention to provide a survey of murals in the Shankill/Falls area, which would require a more extensive analysis of both Loyalist and Republican practices, as well as those that might lie somewhere between or outside of these binary political positions. With that caveat, however, the mural examples discussed can help us to understand of some of the complex issues in post-conflict curating outlined earlier in this paper.

We began with a discussion on curatorial authority and suggested the potential posed by the city-as-museum in empowering individuals and communities to select, interpret and exhibit public art and history, enabling them to negotiate issues of identity and social tension in the post-conflict city. The three mural examples we have examined suggest that this potential is being realised in Belfast. Each mural was curated by a different community group representing at least some members of the Shankill community. It is also notable, however, that two of these murals were funded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, suggesting that the state is continuing to intervene in such community projects. This raises the question

of whether these murals can be seen as a continuation of top-down state initiatives, or instead reflective of post-conflict negotiations as they take place within the respective community. The deliberate avoidance of direct discussion of the Troubles in favour of a nostalgic and romanticised view of British soldiers fighting alongside their colonial comrades seems to echo Rolston's (2010, 286) criticisms of state-funded efforts to politically sanitise the murals.

The overtly anti-racist ethos of the murals discussed demonstrates remarkable confidence in the ability of the murals to positively address social tensions. In this sense, the murals represent an empowered use of shared memory to construct a sense of shared identity in the present. For the Polish and Jewish people of Belfast, to encounter positive representations of people of the same nationality or the same faith on the streets may inspire a sense of belonging that comes with being part of Belfast's past as well as its present. The full potential of this practice to address the continuing divisions between the Loyalist and Republican communities has unfortunately not been realised, however. This is largely due to the "othering" narrative of a-bond-forged-by-violence that runs through these murals. In their staunchly militarised subject matter, these murals continue to represent conflict. The tolerance promoted towards the Polish, Jewish and Commonwealth people represented by the murals is not given freely, but earned by those that have shown military allegiance to Britain and the British empire. For Republicans (and citizens of countries that have experienced the British empire as a threat), the heavy use of images of the Union Jack and the British military still clearly mark out both a symbolic and physical Loyalist territory from which they are excluded historically and unwelcome in the present. This is perhaps most evident in the confrontational representation of Kitchener, known as much for his heavy military suppression of opposition to the British empire, as his role in WW1.

A strong awareness of the 'liminality' of the peace walls, as a stage on which identity is performed, is evident in the attempts to create a more contemplative experience of the murals, through the use of dense, small-scale imagery and text. However, this experience also exercises a degree of control over the viewer and it is clear that not all identity performances are welcome here. Expressions of rejection of or resistance to the identity narratives presented, such as setting the Patterson mural alight, are interpreted by the authoritative curatorial voice as acts of racism and, in effect, criminalised. Similarly, the murals discussed also represent a strong opposition to perceived "enemies of the state" or "terrorists", thus taking up a particular political position that relates to the immediate community conflict and

has a transnational component to it at the same time. Therefore, the shift in the design, production and exhibition of these murals can be seen to reflect a corresponding shift towards a more culturally-assimilative, post-conflict brand of Loyalism, one which employs a shared military heritage to enlist Britain's international allies in the commemoration of the World Wars, on a literal level, but also in the re-enactment of the hostilities and tensions of the Troubles, on a symbolic level.

In conclusion, the Belfast murals we have examined in this paper have demonstrated: how attempts to remember can also be attempts to forget; how the cohesion of some communities can result in the segregation of others; how the representations of one identity can be formed through the invisibility of the other; how one community can experience a new sense of belonging while others experience continued exclusion; and wherever a curatorial narrative is voiced, it may assume the authority to silence another story. Curatorial decisions affect the nature of the post-conflict discourse, in terms of its focus on either past or future or on top-down or bottom-up narrative. In Belfast, the diverse set of formal and informal curators of the murals may blur a clear gaze on who is responsible for such curatorial decisions, but at the same time illustrate vividly the impact of the curators upon everyday discourses in and about the city, narratives of transitional justice and the ways in which different communities feel (un)welcome in specific parts of the city. The ongoing negotiations about whether murals should be kept or changed mirror these debates.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1. Peace walls dividing the Falls and Shankill areas of Belfast, 2016.

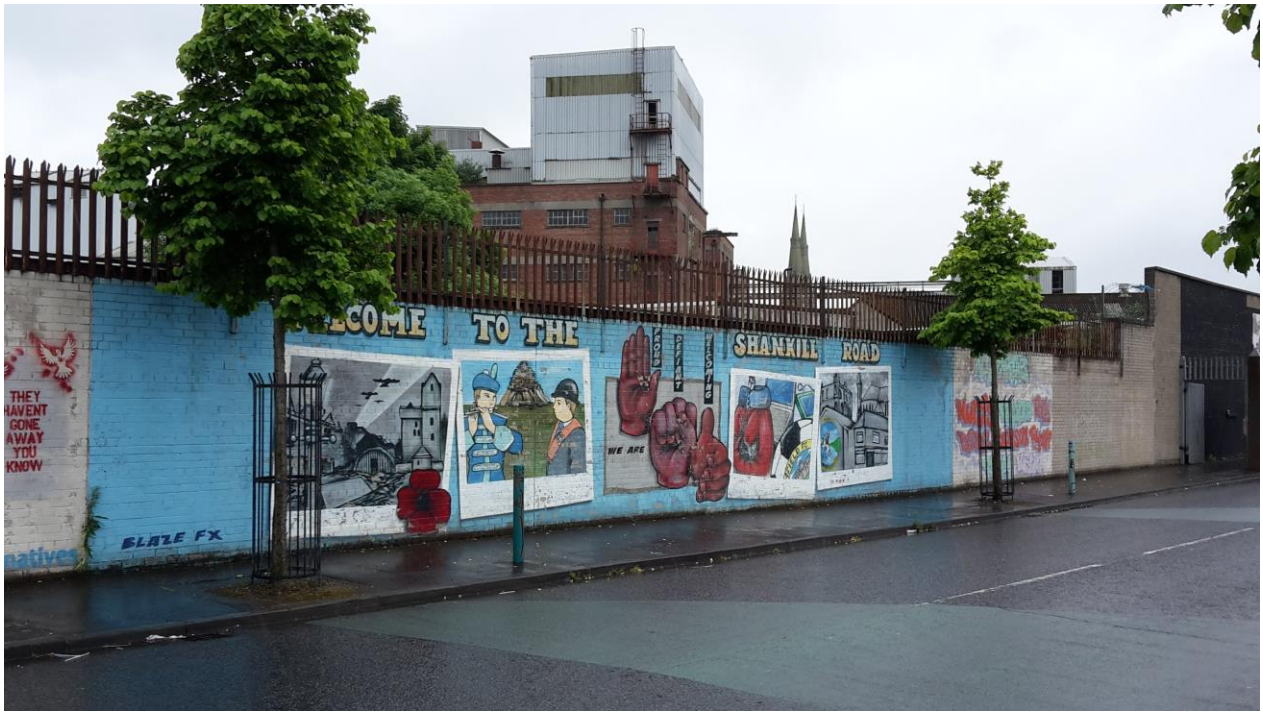

Fig. 2. ‘Welcome to the Shankill Road’ mural, Northumberland Street, Belfast, 2016.

Fig. 3. ‘Lt. Col. John Henry Patterson’ mural, Northumberland Street, Belfast. © Extramural Activity, 2015.

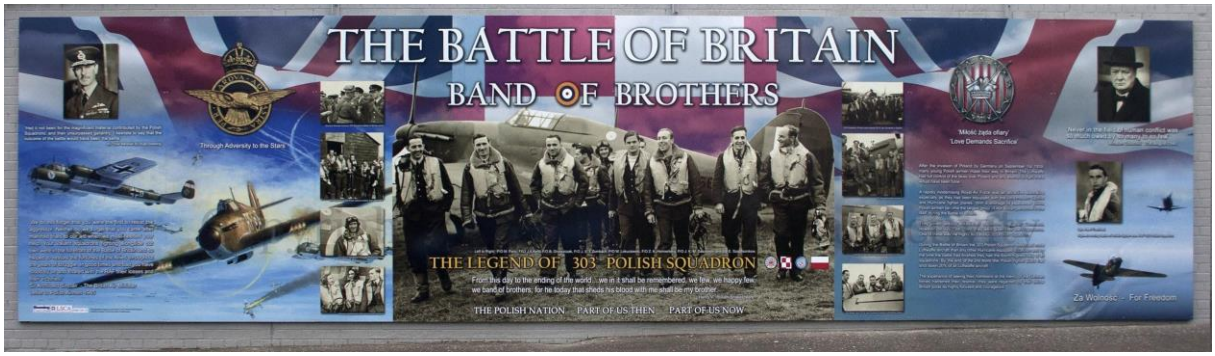

Fig. 4. 'Band of Brothers' mural, Beverley Street, Belfast. © Extramural Activity, 2015.

Fig. 5. 'Kitchener' mural, Northumberland Street, Belfast. © Extramural Activity, 2017.

Fig. 6. Sign alleging ‘racist’ attack on ‘Patterson’ mural, Northumberland Street, Belfast, 2016